

THE WHITE HOUSE: The U-2s' Role

By David Wise

WASHINGTON.

THE U-2 spy plane, made famous by the flight of Francis Gary Powers that shook the world May 1, 1960, is still being widely used by the United States to gather photographic and electronic intelligence.

President Kennedy, as far as this reporter can learn, is completely sincere in informing the Russians that the United States has "in no way altered" its ban on deliberate flights over Soviet territory. But the United States has never promised to stop using the U-2 as a spy plane near Communist territory—and such use continues around the globe.

Since intelligence-gathering is, by definition, a secret business, the United States has never advertised the fact that the U-2 has continued to collect intelligence. But the U. S. disclosure that an Air Force U-2 "may" have "unintentionally" overflown Soviet territory on Sakhalin Island, together with the government's refusal to explain the purpose of the mission, lets the cat out of the bag.

Current use of what the Russians once dubbed "the black lady of espionage" was allowed by Washington to fade into a cloudy limbo after the Powers affair. But a careful look at the record of public statements about the U-2 since May, 1960, makes the picture less cloudy.

On May 1, 1960, it will be recalled, Francis Gary Powers, a thirty-year-old pilot for the Central Intelligence Agency, was sent on a U-2 overflight two weeks before the summit meeting was due to begin in Paris. When the Russians charged May 5 that an American aircraft had violated its airspace, the U. S. said it was a National Aeronautics and Space Administration "weather research" plane that had accidentally wandered over the border from Turkey.

Then Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev

Walter Lippmann is on vacation. His column will be resumed next Tuesday.

shev mousetrapped President Eisenhower by revealing he had both plane and pilot, downed he said, by a rocket near Sverdlovsk, deep inside Russia. The U. S., which had expected Mr. Powers to blow up his plane, was caught in a series of amateurish lies.

But finally, on May 9, 1960, the State Department issued a statement conceding that under Presidential directives, "programs have been developed and put into operation which have included extensive aerial surveillance by unarmed civilian aircraft, normally of a peripheral character but on occasion by penetration."

But the statement also contained language widely interpreted to mean that the U. S. would continue overflights of Soviet territory. Seven days later, facing a ranting Khrushchev at the summit table, President Eisenhower said the U. S. never "threatened continued overflights." He belatedly announced that "these flights were suspended after the recent incident and are not to be resumed."

At the time, the U-2 was flying out of nine overseas bases—Adana, Turkey; Pakistan; Atsugi, Japan; Formosa; Okinawa; the Philippines; Alaska; Wiesbaden, West Germany, and England.

On Jan. 25, 1961, President Kennedy also announced: "Flights of American aircraft penetrating the air space of the Soviet Union have been suspended since May, 1960. I have ordered they not be resumed."

What generally escaped public realization was that both President Eisen-

hower and President Kennedy never promised to stop employing U-2s for what the State Department called "extensive aerial surveillance." Both Presidents promised only to stop overflights in Soviet airspace. And thereby hangs the whole tale.

A dribble of quiet short Air Force announcements since 1960 has provided the only clues to the whereabouts of the U-2s. Here is the chronology:

May 13, 1960: High altitude sampling program, using U-2s to detect atomic radiation, will be renewed over Argentina as part of "Project Crowflight."

August 14, 1961: "U. S. A. F. Air Weather Service is conducting high altitude studies of cyclonic conditions in the Southwest Pacific area. The program is being conducted by a specially configured U-2 aircraft from the Philippines to obtain the benefit of seasonal weather phenomena that exist in this area."

September 5, 1961: "U-2 aircraft are used as flying laboratories" for weather flights "from Alaska." The same month, Australia announced that U. S. U-2s had arrived for "high altitude air sampling."

March 12, 1962: U-2s at Edwards A. F. Base, California, and Patrick A. F. Base, Florida, are engaged in weather studies and "in studies utilizing infrared measuring equipment. The latter carried research instruments to measure infra-red radiation by ballistic missiles."

Benefitting from the 1960 U-2 fiasco, the Kennedy administration was able to respond quickly and without much confusion to the new Soviet charge. But just as Powers' U-2 was dispatched over Russia on the eve of a summit meeting, the Kennedy administration is guilty of a serious error in timing.

Only Aug. 19 the arrival of new U. S. U-2s in England for "atmospheric sampling" caused Moscow to warn U-2s to stay "far away from us." Obviously, the Russians would be looking for a way to dramatize this new warning. Yet, only eleven days later, Washington was forced to admit, a U-2 "may" have drifted over Soviet territory. Once again, the U. S. has handed the Russians a "spy plane" affair on a silver platter.

© 1962 New York Herald Tribune Inc.